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CURRENT OPINION

Pre-Semitic Version of the Fall of Man

In the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* for November, 1914, Professor Langdon publishes the text of a Sumerian religious text of the city of Nippur under the title of "An Account of the Pre-Semitic Version of the Fall of Man." This document would be older than 2200 B.C. and embodies the view of the Nippur School in opposition to the views held at Eridu which we have in the Adapa myth. Our tablet describes the abode of bliss on Mount Dilmun, where absolute peace prevailed. Even the wild animals refrained from injuring the flock, and men were happy, sinless, and always young. Here the tablet is broken and the text mentions the wrath of the god En-ki (or Ea), who swears to cause mankind to perish in endless sleep. The deluge will come and man made of clay will dissolve in the flood. The goddess Ninharsag saves the pious king Tagtug and a few righteous men in a ship. After the flood, Tagtug disobeys the goddess and eats of a forbidden plant and is punished by physical weakness and a shortened life. The forbidden plant is the cassia. However, afterward the goddess Ninharsag provides eight patrons of civilization to aid humanity in its hard lot. The name of one is Abu, the protector of the pastures, who may be compared to Abel. We see by this story that in the third millennium B.C. the Sumerian thinkers of the time raised the problem of individual responsibility, free-will, and determinism in ethical action.

Has the Church Failed?

A few months ago Mr. Edward Lewis, a Congregational minister of London, resigned his pastorate on the ground that he could no longer consciously approve of

organized religion! In the *Atlantic Monthly* for December, 1914, Mr. Lewis himself writes on "The Failure of the Church." The Roman Catholic church, which once controlled the policies of Europe, has now no influence on the vital thought-movement of the world. It can only condemn—the recent official banning of the works of Bergson is the proof of it—it can no longer create living thought. Protestant Christianity has lost its hold upon the people in England and Germany. The first root-cause of the weakness of the church is that it does not believe in a "beyond Christianity," but on the contrary believes in its own potential finality. The second is that the present organized form of the church contradicts the spirit of its founder. The doctrines of the Sermon on the Mount are a dead letter. Moreover, Jesus did not think of founding a church. The third cause of the weakness of the church is its despair of the world. Its central message is that there is, beyond this world, another into which, at the end of this life, entrance will be given by the infinite grace of God. This creates schism and confusion in God's universe. Mr. Lewis concludes his article by the thought that he had to go out "to prepare in the wilderness a highway for God"! We did not say that he went into the wilderness. It is needless to say that modern evangelical Christianity has decided to live and will live. If Mr. Lewis meets with any success in his preaching, he will have to organize some form of society, enact some kind of rules, and, at least during winter, provide for a meeting-place in a building—and therefore he must fall back upon organized religion.

The Story of the Fall

In the *Expositor* for December, 1914, Professor Van Hoonacker writes on "The

Literary Origin of the Narrative of the Fall." Several church fathers explained the narrative of the Fall by allegory. In that story a distinction ought to be made between the kernel or doctrinal substance and the external envelope or form which is the result of the literary process by which the biblical narrative came into existence. The use that Ezekiel (Ezek., chap. 28) made, with regard to the King of Tyre, of the image of the wonderful garden, as it was known by him, is parallel to the use made by the author of the account of the Fall. Both used the same well-known popular tradition and adapted it to a certain didactical purpose.

The Earliest Christian Apology

It is generally accepted now that the Gospel of Luke and the Acts are authentic; what was the purpose of the writer is the question studied by Dr. Plooij in "The Work of St. Luke: a Historical Apology of Pauline Preaching before the Roman Court" in the *Expositor* for December, 1914. Even if St. Luke had the intention to write a third book, the end of the Acts remains awkward if the supposition is true that the author wrote a score or so of years after the arrival of St. Paul in Rome. The first book reaches a final point, while the Acts need a conclusion, a crowning fact. Dr. Plooij says that in the two last verses of the Acts the contrast between the aorist translated by "he abode" and the imperfect translated "received" show that the two years mentioned in Acts 28:30 have passed and that now Paul has been transported elsewhere (the "praetorian guard" of Phil. 1:13). The Acts were written, not as an *exposé* of the teaching of St. Paul in the form of a theological system, but in the form of a history of facts and matters which could serve as material in a Roman procedure. The last words of the book show the point to which the whole of St. Luke's historical apology tends: the very preach-

ing for which he will have to justify himself before the Emperor has been continued by him in Rome under the eyes of the prefect of the praetorium and this without scandal; in this way the end of the Acts shows a fine and eloquent acumen; it almost anticipates the verdict of the Emperor. This is prepared by several traits in the book: the remarks made by him on the fairness of Roman justice whether it be administered by Pilate, who three times declares Jesus innocent, or by Gallio or by Festus. Such a view of Roman justice would scarcely have been defended by a Christian writer after the persecution under Nero. Theophilus, to whom the book is dedicated, would not be a real person but an epitheton denoting the qualities on which the expectation of the convincing force of the narrative is built; perhaps this Theophilus would be Seneca, but Burrhus, who was prefect of the praetorium, might have received a copy of the book. The idea that the physician Luke was the barrister of St. Paul is confirmed by an obscure allusion in the Canon of Muratori.

The Doctrine of the Ministry

In the *London Quarterly Review* for October, 1914, Dr. Griffith Thomas writes on "The Christian Ministry." It becomes more and more clear to Anglican scholars that the doctrine of apostolical succession needs to be reinterpreted. The Bishop of Madras, for instance, has declared his inability to accept the general idea of apostolic succession as based on history, though strongly insisting upon Episcopacy as the guaranty of unity. It seems that succession rather than transmission is the essential feature of the doctrine of the ministry. As for the act of laying-on of hands, it has no significance in itself. The real question at issue is, "What is the character of the New Testament ministry—is the minister a prophet or a priest?" The New Testament does not mention an order of

"priests"; the only priesthood it knows is that of Christ and that of the church herself as the body of Christ. So that high churchmen like Bishop Gore are led to declare that the New Testament alone is insufficient.

Modern Evangelicalism

In the *London Quarterly Review* for October, 1914, Principal Garvie writes on "The Evangelical Presentation of Christianity." The term "evangelical" has become a party label since the Reformation. We may define evangelicalism as the mode of Christian thought in which emphasis is laid on salvation from sin through man's faith in God's grace through the sacrifice of Christ. The evangelical emphasis on the atonement is true to the teaching of Jesus in affirming that man's sin does disturb his relation to God. Evangelicalism, however, is not tied down to certain ancient theological types: the story of the Fall is not the basis of its scheme. Its appeal is to the human conscience and human history. It is, however, essential that a man should pass through the experience of salvation in Christ's sacrifice before he can exercise that moral insight and spiritual discernment. We must let Christ save us before we can understand how he saves. The one-sidedness which has sometimes characterized evangelicalism can be corrected from other types of Christian experience without inconsistency. Partiality and exclusiveness of any kind is dangerous; the mystical type of piety may end in emotional extravagance, the sacra-

mental and sacerdotal type may sink into formalism and it is true that evangelicalism has sometimes been narrow and has laid too great a stress on orthodoxy. It remains true, however, that the sacramental system against which evangelicalism has waged a relentless opposition is the less distinctively Christian of all the types of piety. The New Testament does not offer any warrant for it.

The Origin of the God-Ideas

In the *Journal of Religious Psychology* for November, 1914, Dr. W. T. Shepherd writes on "The Origin of the Ideas of Gods" from the point of view of a psychologist. The ideas of gods have not arisen from the contemplation of any one class of phenomena alone, from totemism, from the deification of ancestors, from Great Makers, from the personification of abstractions, but from all these sources. Newton saw an apple falling from a tree and conceived the hypothesis of gravitation. The primitive man working on very similar lines formed the hypothesis that the conception of a god was a satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon of thunder. But unlike Newton, he did not go to work to prove his hypothesis. The primitive factors in the genesis of the conception of gods are imagination, primitive reason, and credulity. These god-ideas show a progressive evolution and degeneration, and a process of unification of god-ideas is notable, as when Marduk became the chief Babylonian god and Ammon-Ra the supreme deity of the Egyptians.